

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes
FINAL
April 14, 2010, 7:30 p.m.
Chenery Middle School Community Room

Note: This was a joint meeting of the Warrant Committee, the Board of Selectmen, and the School Committee, sponsored by the Warrant Committee.

WC Members Present: Chair Curtis, Members Allison, Becker, Brusch, Callanan, Dash, Epstein, Hofmann, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, and Millane

WC Members Absent: McLaughlin and Smith

BOS Members Present: Chair Jones, Selectmen Firenze, Paolillo

School Committee Members Present: Chair Rittenburg, Superintendent Entwistle, Members Graham, Parmett, Scharfman, Slap, and Vose

Town Administrator Younger, Assistant Town Administrator Conti, Town Accountant Hagg

The WC meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by Chair Curtis.

The BOS meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by BOS Chair Jones.

The SC meeting was called to order at 7:32 pm by SC Chair Rittenburg.

Chair Curtis began by noting that there will be two budget presentations made this evening, as well as an override discussion, including the allocation amount for town and schools. He said he would also review the budget calendar.

Presentation of Available Revenue Budget by Town Administrator

Town Administrator Younger said that he reached the “available funds budget” target number by reducing items from the “needs budget.” He said that, in October 2009, he implemented a hiring freeze for FY10. Therefore, certain positions were vacant and unfunded in FY10. Some positions were put back in the needs budget, but they are coming back out for the available revenue budget.

Highlights of the reductions include:

\$17K – legal budget

\$231K – insurance (this included cutting the proposed Social Security for part-time employees, health insurance for the proposed restoration of positions, and workers comp. adjustment for restored positions)

\$40K – to cut a police cruiser

- \$132K – for two eliminated police positions (traffic and community services)
- \$90K – to reduce two fire positions
- \$122K – to reduce three DPW positions
- \$11K – for a part-time administrative position in the facilities department

The budget was reduced \$646,745 in addition to the \$66,809 which had been adjusted downward earlier from the originally proposed FY11 budget.

Mr. Younger also highlighted savings for the FY11 budget, which include combining a social worker position in COA and Public Health, and savings with the reduced salaries of the Health Director position, Town Clerk, and assistant Town Clerk. He said he did not reduce the Capital Budget as he is serious about the need to maintain this funding. In the accounting department, the budget analyst position was retained.

Chair Curtis clarified that these eliminated positions were vacant and that people are not getting “laid off”. Mr. Younger confirmed this. What programs will be cut as a result of this budget? Mr. Younger replied that programs have been reduced throughout the years. BOS Member Paolillo said he is meeting with department heads to vet reductions and the implications of those reductions.

The WC discussed the town’s budget as reported tonight, including noting that:

- prevention and investigation are the two core programs preserved in the Police Department
- combining departments (COA, Public Health, Recreation Department) requires a change in by-laws and can’t be done for FY11
- some of the smaller structural changes are being implemented, e.g. paperless payroll stubs, facilities clearing entire sidewalk around school and town buildings, and one mail pick-up.

911 regionalization discussions have begun (Belmont is part of a study), and BOS Member Paolillo is meeting with Representative Brownsberger to further discuss fire suppression regionalization. Mr. Younger said that he is regionalizing a position with Watertown, and is regionalizing with Arlington for weights and measures. The next level of structural changes probably won’t get accomplished by the end of this year, he said.

Presentation of Available Revenue Budget by Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent Entwistle began by noting that he used a program-based approach for looking at the school budget. It required significant impacts to reduce more than \$2.5M from the student needs budget while attempting to minimize the impact on students and maintain focus on the Community Dialogue priorities, the long term goals, and the 18-month improvement strategy. He reviewed the process for arriving at the cuts. He reviewed those areas that are legally mandated as well as those that impact direct core instruction.

82% of services in the school budget are directed at students, with 18% directed at administrative/leadership. This is quite lean, compared to anywhere, he said. He reduced student-centered areas by 5% and cut leadership and administrative by 10%. 31.8 positions and 35 people will be impacted by reductions or position eliminations.

Highlights of some of the cuts include:

- \$880K for across-district text books, supplies, and technology
 - reduced physical education and music instruction
 - 8th grade class sizes will go up as team staffing has been reduced
 - three science teachers have been reduced at the high school
 - there is a 20% reduction in social services to students
 - there will be no elementary library program as the library aid positions have been cut
 - 1 middle school guidance position has been eliminated
 - Chenery MCAS support has been eliminated
 - RtI assistance has been reduced
 - non-direct Instructional Services has been reduced
 - a Chenery technology class will be eliminated and replaced with study halls
 - all freshman sports have been eliminated
 - the budget portion of class assistance has been eliminated
 - two psychological services positions were eliminated
 - administrative support has been reduced across the board
 - reduced maintenance at all facilities

Dr. Entwistle said while he reviewed all new proposals, most weren't funded.

Questions and discussion followed.

SC Chair Rittenburg commented that the SC's mission is to help meet the needs of students and to responsibly report to citizens what it will take to adequately meet the needs of students. This available revenue budget does not adequately meet the needs of students, she said.

Chair Curtis said he would like the WC to set up a process by which to work through these budgets and to create a plan to present two budgets (available revenue and override) at Town Meeting. Now we can say: "This is what the town and schools came up with utilizing the available money; we know what it means in real life." Curtis continued: we could change the available revenue allocation for these budgets. The override structure and amount will be determined by the BOS.

Member Libenson asked Superintendent Entwistle if some of the 35 people cut in this budget reflected people added into the needs budget (similar to the town's scenario)? Superintendent Entwistle replied that 35 people will be impacted by this.

Chair Curtis noted that there is \$1.7M in free cash that has not yet been allocated, but that he is not in favor of tapping into free cash to enhance these budgets. FY12 will be far worse and we should rollover what we can to help that out. Member Allison agreed and added that stimulus money was used in FY10 to plug continuing expenses and that there is no virtue in rolling the pain forward yet again. Member Becker asked if the unfunded federal mandates had increased from FY10 to FY11. Dr. Missal replied that they did increase and that there is a loss of revenue to contend with as well – as LABBB credit was used fully in FY10. SC Member Scharfman noted that the IT reductions risk catastrophic failure and that we fail to fund textbooks at our peril, as well.

SC Chair Rittenburg said she would like to explore an available revenue allocation change; if an override doesn't pass, this is not an acceptable budget. Chair Curtis said that we could reduce the town budget by a number and that exact same dollar amount would then be put into schools. If we move the line, he said, I want to be clear that we take from the town to give to the schools. What basis could a recommendation be made for moving that line? Curtis asked. Member Allison said it is difficult to know the basis for a recommendation to adjust the allocation without knowing what the impact would be for the town side. Once the town budget is set, she said, it is set. The school budget can be reallocated on the fly.

Member Callanan said that a lot of thought went into the allocation and that both sides will need to understand pain. SC Member Parmet noted that while the town is not filling empty positions, the school is losing 35 positions necessary to educate 3000 children. Member Dash asked what top 5 things would the schools put back in and where would the town take them out from? Chair Curtis agreed that this was an important question, but a difficult one for both town and schools to answer on the spot.

BOS Chair Jones suggested that Selectman Paolillo meet with the schools and town to see what, if anything, could happen with the revenue allocation line. Chair Curtis agreed, and requested that Paolillo work with both sides to understand the impact to the town with less money and what would be restored to the school side. Curtis asked that Paolillo report back to the WC next week. SC Chair Rittenburg reminded the WC that the motion on the split clearly stated that this was a “starting point” and that the numbers would be revisited. To not do so, she said, invalidates that motion.

Discussion of Possible Override

Structure

Chair Curtis said that the override will consist of a single number, with a decision to allocate to town and schools made in advance.

Amount

BOS Chair Jones said that, when deciding on an amount, the Board will need to consider the average citizen in Belmont. While the retirement group got 3% more in salary this year, the average voter's salary went down. He noted that the appetite for a large increase in taxes might be limited, especially when considering we may need an override for two years in a row. Member Bruschi noted that certain things will need to be made known: is this a status quo override? an enhancements override? a level service override? will there be a recovery override next year? SC Chair Rittenburg suggested that, since TM represents the citizens of the town, perhaps the BOS could present the available revenue budget to TM and get a sense from TM about an override. BOS Chair Jones noted that TM can increase spending, without increasing revenue. The override number has to make sense to the average voter, he said. Chair Curtis noted that the Moderator does not have time in the TM schedule for a detailed budget conversation. Selectman Paolillo said that the BOS will schedule two budget forums for both TM members and residents to inform and listen to residents.

Member Libenson noted that, given the impending 2012 budget crisis, if the override fails this year, we will have a bigger hill to climb in FY12. There is a lot of pain to go around and everyone – school employees, town employees, and citizens (through reduced services and potentially higher taxes) – will have to share in the pain. The question, he said, is how to share in the pain in a way that feels fair.

Selectman Firenze said that the override number may not be that important. Either you're in favor of it or not. The BOS needs to come up with a number that has the highest probability of passing. Additionally, he said, for me to support this override, I need to feel comfortable that we are making progress with structural changes. SC Chair Rittenburg added, we need to have clear evidence that structural changes will produce actual savings.

Allocation Town/Schools

Chair Curtis confirmed that the BOS had decided to make an allocation of an override number for the town and schools.

Discussion of Budget Calendar

Chair Curtis noted that next week, April 21, Selectman Paolillo will report out on his meeting with the town and schools regarding the available revenue allocation and the impact to both the town and schools of changing it.

Subcommittee reports will be due on May 12.

Other

WC Member Hofmann moved to adjourn the WC Meeting at 10:03 pm.

BOS Chair Jones moved to adjourn the BOS Meeting at 10:xx pm.

SC Chair Rittenburg moved to adjourn the SC Meeting at 10:xx pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary